

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REID. I appreciate my friend from Minnesota yielding for a unanimous consent request.

Under the time controlled by the Democrats, Senator STABENOW would have the first 10 minutes, Senator DURBIN the second 10 minutes, and Senator LAUTENBERG the third 10 minutes, or if one of them is not here they would each get 10 minutes of our time. I ask unanimous consent that that be the order for the Democrats.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Minnesota.

MEDICARE'S NEW PRESCRIPTION DRUG PROGRAM

Mr. COLEMAN. Mr. President, I had the opportunity yesterday to be in Eden Prairie, MN, at a senior citizens center to talk to people gathered there about the opportunity they now have to obtain a discount card to lower the cost of prescription drugs. This is done less than 6 months after the law was changed. I want to applaud Secretary Thompson and the folks from CMS for moving so quickly.

What I find so troubling is I was on the Senate floor yesterday and I heard the distinguished Senator from Massachusetts and today the distinguished minority leader talking about how terrible this is and lambasting something that is just beginning. I ask that we put aside the partisan rhetoric and see if we can work together to give seniors an opportunity to get prescription drugs at lower costs. The card in question is one, by the way, if one is a senior at the lower end of the economic ladder and as an individual they have an income of under \$13,000—I think it is about \$12,500 for an individual and about \$16,500 for a couple—that discount card has contained within it a \$600 credit. That \$600 credit will cover the cost of prescription drugs from now until the end of the year and then \$600 starting again in January; so, in fact, it is \$1,200 for 18 months. With this card, seniors have an opportunity to get a list of the pharmacies at which they shop, get a list of the drugs they need, and then be able to price compare.

I am not very computer literate, but many of us have complained about the complexity of the Medicare law. There is certainly a lot of debate about the complexity of the statute, but there is very little debate about the simplicity of the process that is involved in seniors figuring out what their options are under this card. If seniors call 1-800-MEDICARE, they can speak with someone, tell the folks at Medicare where they live, what their income is, what drugs they need. They will be given a list with a whole range of opportunities, and then they can pick the program that is at the lowest cost to them.

If a senior is computer literate themselves or they have a kid or even a

grandkid who understands how to work computers, or in our case we had folks from AARP and from the Board of Aging—they were all there to work with these seniors—it makes it very simple.

For those who talked about mystifying phases of confusion, why do we not just give it a chance to work. Can we not put aside partisan rhetoric and lambasting for a little bit of time and simply come together to say seniors deserve lower cost prescription drugs?

I would like to see an opportunity for seniors to get safe drugs from anywhere, and if we can figure out a way to do a pilot project to get drugs from Canada, I would support that. We know that is not the panacea, that is not the cure all. We have passed a bill now that for the first time gives seniors the opportunity to get prescription drug coverage. Over 187,000 in Minnesota will get that coverage, and over 119,000 will have this \$600 benefit.

I was taken aback by the comments of the Democratic leader when he talked about the Federal Government as a model in regard to military procurement and getting things at low cost. Goodness gracious, we have all heard the stories of \$500 wrenches and toilets. There is a better way to do it.

We have an opportunity now for seniors to be able to price shop. We have urged our seniors and I urge seniors, do not get the card right away, do not make their choice right away. Window shop for a couple of weeks, 10 days, figure out what is the lowest cost, and do the price comparison.

We have an opportunity, and I hope we take it, to put aside the political hits and being negative about things even before the program is given a chance to work.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Mr. COLEMAN. I do want to talk briefly about the economy and perhaps from the same perspective. I begin my remarks on the progress of the American economy with an observation of H.L. Mencken in 1921. He said:

The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led safely) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary.

Much of the economic commentary we are hearing from the other side of the aisle in the Senate and out on the campaign trail seems to fit this description very well.

Among the hobgoblins: that the President is encouraging companies to move overseas; that his tax cuts are intended to primarily help his rich friends; and that this is the worst economy in who knows how long.

There is just one problem with these and other claims: The facts. They are alarming for sure, but they are also imaginary.

The economy is strong and growing, posing annual growth rates of 8.2 percent, 4.1 percent, and 4.2 percent in the

last three-quarters. Jobs are being created, 308,000 last month. The recalculation of job creation the first 2 months in this year is another 200,000. I believe the figure is 750,000 in the last 7 months. Housing sales are at an all-time high level, and so is home ownership. Inflation is low. Mortgage rates continue to be low. I wonder which of these economic indicators the Senator from Massachusetts wants to be less positive.

The truth is, we should not be comparing our economy to perfection and asking: Why not? We should be comparing our economy to reality and asking: Why?

We had the tech bubble burst, a bubble that should never have been allowed to inflate so high. We had corporate scandals. We had corporate greed. We had Enron and WorldCom. They were certainly nonpartisan, but they were encouraged by the get rich quick ethic of the 1990s. They were reprehensible and we have dealt with them.

We had the attacks on September 11. My colleagues across the aisle talk about losing jobs and what a terrible economy. Every single time we have to reflect, we remember September 11 and the devastating impact that had both on our hearts, on our souls, on our confidence, and on our economy. Now we have the daily war on terror.

If that picture had been drawn for us 5 years ago, how many would have predicted the economy would be in as good shape as it is? The reason is sound monetary policy and tax cuts that were extremely well timed and sized to stimulate the economy when it needed it the most.

Talk to small business folks. They understand the importance of bonus depreciation, increased expensing, cutting the top bracket, reinvesting in the business, and then growing jobs. That is what has happened.

As that stimulus is running its course, we in this body need to enact a jobs bill, a transportation bill, and the Energy bill. We need to enact tort reform to build upon our current progress. We have to stop the filibustering and get some work done.

Unfortunately, some in this body and on the campaign trail are obsessed with talking about and addressing the economic situation that existed 2 years ago and administering medicine to a disease we are already curing. The President deserves credit for economic policies that weathered America through to better times.

Some may have political reasons for keeping the people alarmed, but the mounting evidence of economic strength is convincing to the American people, and the American people understand that reality is preferable to all those hobgoblins.

I yield the floor.
The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CHAFEE). The Senator from Utah.

Mr. BENNETT. Mr. President, I thank my colleague for his presentation on the economy. I intend to continue in the same vein.